

ESTIMATE—PRESERVATION OF LIFE AND PROPERTY
FROM VESSELS SHIPWRECKED.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

SUBMITTING

*An estimate for expenses growing out of the act for the preservation of life
and property from vessels shipwrecked.*

JANUARY 27, 1855.—Referred to the Committee of Ways and Means, and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
January 24, 1855.

SIR: To enable this department to give effect to the act of Congress
“for the better preservation of life and property from vessels ship-
wrecked on the coasts of the United States,” approved 14th December
last, being for payment of compensation of superintendents, keepers of
stations, refitting old stations, constructing new ones, and furnishing
the same with the necessary apparatus and supplies, and for incidental
expenses, such as repairs, replenishing articles lost, &c., there is re-
quired the sum of forty thousand dollars.

In submitting this estimate, I deem the occasion a fitting one to
give a brief statement of what has been done in aid of this humane
object.

During the years 1848, 1849, and 1850, Congress made appropri-
ations for the establishment of life-saving stations on the coasts of New
Jersey and Long Island, and, under the direction of this department,
twenty-seven life-saving stations were established and supplied with
all the necessary apparatus, constituting a system or chain, extending
from the dividing point of coast between Rhode Island and Connecti-
cut to Sandy Hook, on which the most frequent and fatal shipwrecks
had happened to vessels bound to and from New York. Since the
erection of these stations, they have been the means of saving many
lives and much valuable property, and would have proved still more
beneficial had they been placed in charge of suitable persons, appoint-
ed and paid for the purpose, whose duty it would have been to con-
stantly supervise them, and see that every part of the apparatus was
in proper condition, whenever occasion might require its use. In con-

sequence of this want of attention, they were suffered to fall into a dilapidated state, and on many occasions were unable to render but little service.

On the 30th September, 1851, another appropriation of ten thousand dollars was made, for the purchase of life-boats and other means for rendering assistance in cases of shipwreck, to be located on the coast of the United States. This appropriation, as well as one for a similar amount and like purposes made in 1852, was expended in the purchase of boats, which, on application being made for them by collectors, light-house keepers, and in some instances individuals were located at different points along the Atlantic coast, but without any provision or security being made for their preservation.

When an appropriation of \$10,000 was made for a like purpose, in the spring of 1853, the department required, in providing boats at points where wrecks were likely to happen, and where there was no government officer to look after the same, that persons living upon the spot should enter into bond, with security in the penalty of \$500, for the care and preservation of the boat and its appurtenances, for its application to the uses intended, and quarterly reports to the department of the services rendered. This requirement has been attended with very beneficial results—the boats being properly cared for, readily and well manned for service whenever required, and used only for the benevolent purposes for which they were intended.

When the appropriation of \$20,000 “for the continuation of the system of protecting human life from shipwreck, as heretofore established by life-boats on the New Jersey coast,” and the two appropriations of \$10,000 each “for life-boats and other means of rendering assistance to wrecked mariners on the coast of the United States,” were made at the last session of Congress, the department, in view of its previous recommendation, and the passage of a bill in conformity thereto by one branch of Congress, and looking to the similarity of circumstances of the two coasts of New Jersey and Long Island, both in respect to the frequency of wrecks and past provision for saving life, was disposed to provide in the same manner and to the same extent for the latter as seemed to be the design of Congress for the former. Accordingly, an acting superintendent was appointed for each coast, with instructions to examine and report upon the condition of the old stations, which were ten miles apart, and to select the most suitable sites between each of them for the erection of new boat-houses, so as to make them five miles apart instead of ten, as heretofore. This duty was promptly performed, and the result of their examinations was made known in their reports to the department in October last. As was expected, the old stations, for want of proper care, were in such condition as to render them almost useless, and would require a considerable outlay to put them in proper order. In view of the limited appropriation, it was, under the circumstances, deemed most advisable, instead of dividing the means between the old stations and those intended to be established, to place the old ones in good working order, as the season was at hand when wrecks might be expected to occur, and to erect the new houses, and furnish them with a boat each, out of the balance, and supply the remaining

articles required by the several stations when further means should be supplied by Congress. The agents were therefore instructed accordingly, and are now engaged in the performance of that duty.

The act of Congress relating to these two coasts was passed on the 14th of December last, as was anticipated; and it is for the purpose of completing the work which the department commenced under the appropriations of the last session of Congress, and which is sanctioned by the act referred to, that the sum herein mentioned is asked to be appropriated.

The appropriation of \$12,500 also made at the last session for the purchase of life-boats, to be located at twenty-five points on Lake Michigan, is being disbursed as fast as circumstances will allow. Boats have been constructed for twenty-three of the places designated in the law, but, owing to the difficulty of transportation, have been somewhat delayed in reaching their destination. The remaining two points will be supplied so soon as the required bond for their safe-keeping is furnished the department.

A brief statement has thus been given of what has been done by this department in carrying out the several acts of Congress relating to the life-saving establishment; and whether other appropriations are to be made for a continuance of this humane and benevolent undertaking, by placing at its disposal funds for the purchase of boats to be located from time to time at such points as may be deemed most useful, it is respectfully left for the wisdom of Congress to determine.

I am, very respectfully,

JAMES GUTHRIE,
Secretary of the Treasury.

Hon. LINN BOYD,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

